2: Sanders E-5 (no date) 1949 EEl Bulgaria EEl

trees above, pitiful reminders of a once-proud forest. A hurried mountain stream called Dragalevtsy River passes through the village and, in doing so, turns the grist mills and assists with the washing of clothes. 133

A mile to the east of Dragalevtsy is Simeonovo, a settlement decidedly run-down at the heel. It was here that I spent a busy morning trying to explain to two villagers that the earth was really global rather than flat. Farther on around the shoulder of the mountain is Bistritsa, where the people are said to sing as they dance the *horo:* 186

> "There is no city more populous than Sofia,
> There is no river more majestic than the Iskar,
> There is no mountain more lofty than Vitosha."

This is an accurate illustration of ethnocentrism, or the belief prevalent among most people that they, and they alone, are the center of the universe and God's chosen children.

My usual approach to the village was across the unfenced fields and up the mountainside. Sometimes I came along the dull road from Sofia. By either way, the great mountain, changing color from hour to hour, was a rest to the eyes. The way across the fields led one gently into the village through patches of vegetable gardens and clumps of overhanging fruit trees. Upon entering the village from the direction of Sofia I passed the cemetery and then was closed in between whitewashed walls which lined the curving streets. Animals also felt much at home in these streets. Just before sunset the village goatherd headed the two hundred animals in his care toward the settlement. Into Renaissance Square they trotted, a capering mass of gray, black, and white. At each street several goats detached themselves from the rest to run unguided into their respective dwellings. The same scene occurred when the pigs came squealing home. At other times of day peasant girls passed by carrying washing to be pounded on rocks and dipped into the icy water of Dragalevtsy River. Hikers, many of them, lounged around Bai Penko's, or tramped through the streets obviously amused at the manners of the peasants. 631 [231]

Few things were as dependent upon the weather as the state of the village streets: muddy beyond description in the autumn and spring, 132

2:Sanders E-5 (no date) 1949 EE1 Bulgaria EE1

dusty in the summer, icy or slushy in the winter. The refuse from most of the houses flowed through little trenches into the ditches along the streets, thence to be carried, if enough water could be diverted from Dragalevtsy River, to some place below. Fortunately, blasts of fresh, pure air rolled down from the mountain most of the time.

While all of the mountain villages had the same kind of streets as Dragalevtsy, it alone had electricity. These other villages disappeared from the sight of men as soon as shadows stole up the mountainside, but Dragalevtsy burst into view at dusk as electric lights from street and dwelling shone against the dark background of Vitosha, vividly revealing the location and size of the village. (Electric lights were first used there in 1928.) The lights of the village used to go out one by one as bedtime approached, and at ten o'clock even the street lights were off, leading one to the conclusion that the street lights were as much for adornment as for public safety.

Frequently I had to leave the village alone after dark to return to the American College, where I taught and lived during most of the year. Invariably the peasants, still under the sway of a custom wise enough in Turkish times, argued that sensible people never left the village late at night.

"But what is there to be afraid of?" I asked.

"Oh, but one never can tell."

"Are there bandits around?"

"Thank God, no."

"Will I run into wolves?"

"No, not at this time of year. But there are sheep dogs."

"If sheep dogs are all I have to worry about, I guess I had better be starting," I told them.

They would then reply:

"*Gospodine* [Mister], you are a brave man," but I could tell from the way they shook their heads when they spoke that they considered me more foolhardy than brave.

Once away from the village I turned to look at the irregular string of beads of light that was Dragalevtsy and thought of the people with whom I had talked during the day and of their homes, around which centered their simple hopes and unpretentious dreams.

of the pine forest in the vicinity of Sofia with the intent of grabbing the timber.

With the re-apparition of the Agrarians in the Government presided over by M. Muchanov, the same methods were noticeable. Thus the „*Burgaska Poshta*" of March 11 and 18, 1934 refers to extensive illicit felling of forests in the region of Aitos, the Plovdiv „*Borba*" in April of the same year complains that the then Minister of Agriculture proceeded within 7 or 8 months to replace all the forest guards with his own partisans etc.

The aftermath of the devastation of the forests was a great deterioration of the climate as a result of erosion and denudation. The Journal of the Society of Bulgarian Economists for September 1933 published an article by M. Ts. Doutsev, giving certain illuminating figures. The forest belt which in 1,900 covered 32 % of the country, had diminished to 27 % in 1912 and to 19 % in 1926. Observations gathered from 67 meteorologigal stations reported that while the annual rainfall averaged 820 litres in 1900, it had decreased to 690 in 1919 and to 490 in 1921. The more impressive figures were those of the stations at Yambol and Nova Zagora which had recorded in 1900 and 1921, of 819 and 364 respectively for the first, and of 825 and 520 litres for the second. The Maritsa basin recorded a rainfall of only 500 litres per sq. metre and this was the cause of the recent poor harvests.[1] An affluent of the river Maritsa, the Topolnitsa, which had a flow of 700 to 800 litres per second, now had only 250 to 300, and this falling off could be traced to the destruction of the forests in its catchment area. M. Doutsev demanded that the Sylvan administration should be freed from political in-

[1] M. D. Christov, a former Minister of Agriculture declared in the Sobranye on December 11, 1928 that the rainfall in North Bulgaria averaged 600 to 650 litres per sq. metre while in the Plovdiv district it was only 370 litres.

fluences in order that the forests might be efficiently protected and he advocated the militarisation of the foresters as the best way of achieving this aim. The grazing of cattle in the great timber forests accounted for their gradual deterioration and transformation into stunted brushwood. This was due to the shortage of pasture land, of which there was only enough for feeding four million head of cattle, while the number of cattle in Bulgaria was fourteen million. The requirements of this head of cattle is about five million kilogrammes of fodder, 4/5 of which is supplied from the forests, the foliage of the trees being used as such. Goats did the greatest harm, there were 250 of them per thousand inhabitants in Bulgaria, 750 in Greece, 150 in Serbia and 25 in Rummania. By these ratios one could also gauge the relative condition of the forests in these countries.

The gradual decrease in local precipitation which is of such importance to the cultivator, as well as the resulting inundations, with the appaling destruction they cause in the fertile valleys, all of which may be traced to the unchecked felling of the forests has begun to make itself felt. We thus find deputy N. Terkalanov declaring in the Sobranye on December 11, 1928, that the yearly loss from drought could be reckoned as amounting to a reduction of the crops by 180,000 tons of cereals, 20,000 tons of industrial cultures, 10,000 of vegetables and 100,000 tons of fodder, of a value of two milliard leva. The loss caused by drought during 1934 was estimated at five milliard leva, though the harvest was an average one. Big losses were also incurred through inundations, the river Kamtsia alone caused damage amounting to 3·5 millions annually.

Travellers in the Balkan regions cannot help noticing how vast expances of once fertile land are getting buried deep beneath tons of rubble and sand, sent down by